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ABSTRACT

A study examined how at-risk readers constructed meaning while reading, writing about, and discussing a full-length novel during Transactional Literature Discussions (TLD). Subjects were six fifth-grade students, four males and two females. Students chose the novel and participated in 15 group sessions of 45 minutes over 8 weeks. Scaffolded instruction was used to encourage student response and joint construction of meaning through discussion. Data consisted of audio and video tapes of the sessions; written responses to the story; and pre- and post-think alouds, writing samples, and informal reading inventories. Results by discourse analysis indicated that the interaction and dialogue about the story was collaborative, reflected a sense of inquiry, showed that students assumed responsibility for their reading and writing, used meaning-making strategies, and, further that the teacher used modeling, instructing, questioning, feeding back, and contingency managing to assist student performance. Findings revealed that individual student responses varied widely in quality and frequency. Envisioning possibilities and understanding characters were predominant responses. The quality of the talk sessions was more sophisticated when the teacher participated with the students. Student performance improved on post-think alouds; four students made gains of one or more grade levels in comprehension on post-performance reading inventories. Students successfully used wondering on paper to record their immediate responses, but struggled with extended journal writing. Future research should explore the use of scaffolded instruction to help at-risk readers expand their initial responses through writing. (Contains 3 figures and 29 references.) (Author/CR)

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Can I Say What I Think? A Case Study of At-Risk Readers Making Meaning During Transactional Literature Discussions

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RUNNING HEAD: CAN I SAY WHAT I THINK?

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Abstract

This multiple case study investigated how six at-risk readers constructed meaning while reading, writing about, and discussing a full-length novel during Transactional Literature Discussions (TLD). Students chose the novel and participated in fifteen group sessions which met for 45 minutes per day over eight weeks. Scaffolded instruction was used to encourage student response and joint construction of meaning through discussion. Data consisted of audio and video tapes of the sessions; written responses to the story; and pre and post think alouds, writing samples, and informal reading inventories. A discourse analysis revealed that the interaction and dialogue about the story was collaborative, reflected a sense inquiry, showed that students assumed responsibility for their reading and writing, used meaning-making strategies, and revealed that the teacher used modeling, instructing, questioning, feeding back, and contingency managing to assist student performance. Individual student responses varied widely in quality and frequency. Envisioning possibilities and understanding characters were predominant responses. The quality of the talk sessions was more sophisticated when the teacher participated with students. Student performance improved on post-think alouds; four students made gains of one or more grade levels in comprehension on post-performance reading inventories. Students successfully used wondering on paper to record their immediate responses, but struggled with extended journal writing.

Can I Say What I Think? A Case Study of At-Risk Readers Making Meaning During Transactional Literature Discussions

"Can I say what I think?" was a question frequently asked by one of the six students who participated in this multiple case study which investigated how at-risk fifth-graders jointly constructed meaning through scaffolded discussions. The answer to this question, of course, was "yes." We wanted students to think about the text they were reading and believed they could if instruction actively involved them in meaning-making.

Historically, instruction for at-risk readers has been dominated by low-level skills rather than reading and comprehending whole texts (Allington, 1983; Hiebert, 1983; Johnston & Allington, 1991; Stanovich, 1986). Compensatory and remedial programs, such as Chapter I, have been found to reduce the amount of time these students spend reading and writing with connected texts (Allington & Johnston, 1989; McGill-Franzen & Allington, 1990); limit interaction and conversation among teachers and students (Cazden, 1988); and give students few choices about their reading and writing (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 1989). Another troublesome area has been a general lack of congruence between Chapter I and classroom instruction in terms of goals, instructional strategies, activities, and materials (Allington & Johnston, 1989; Johnston, Allington, Afflerbach, 1985; Walp & Walmsley, 1989). Even when attempts have been made to achieve congruence, teachers reported that reinforcement of skills was the most frequent method (Bean,

McDonald, & Fotta, 1990, pp. 5-6).

Recently the use of full length books to teach children to read has become more popular (Cullinan, 1992; McGee, 1992). Teachers reported in a national survey that 88% of their students were receiving literature-based instruction (National Assessment of Educational Progress [NAEP], 1992). Nevertheless, literature instruction becomes problematic when it is conducted in a nonliterary manner, particularly when teachers focus on testing students' comprehension through question-answer recitation (Langer, 1994; Purves, 1992; Rosenblatt, 1938). This reflects reading to gather information, or efferent reading, which is inconsistent with what readers do when they read literature, that is, to respond aesthetically and experience the story or poem (Rosenblatt, 1938, 1978). When reading literature, aesthetic reading is of primary importance because it encourages students to appreciate "...the full sensuous, emotional, and intellectual impact of the work" (Rosenblatt, 1938, p. 130).

Reading is a dynamic relationship in which readers transact with the text and recreate the work in the context of their experiences, ideas, and emotions (Rosenblatt, 1978); yet, research has shown that at-risk readers take a more passive and efferent than aesthetic stance toward literature (Langer, 1990; Purcell-Gates, 1991). Finding that remedial readers had difficulty constructing meaningful wholes, Purcell-Gates (1991) recommended that future research investigate instruction that moves readers

beyond the word-level to develop an active relationship between the reader and text. This, however, requires the assistance of a teacher who can nurture students' transactions with text.

The work of Vygotsky (1986) has underscored the critical role of dialogue and social interaction in a child's intellectual development. Vygotsky identified the zone of proximal development (ZPD) as an area of immediate potential growth which is sensitive to instruction. He argued that to be effective, instruction must target the learner's ZPD, begin on an interpsychological or social level, then gradually move the learner to the intrapsychological level where the learning is internalized. The tutoring relationship in which an expert helps one with less expertise gain proficiency with a particular function has been referred to as scaffolding (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976). When aimed at the learner's ZPD, scaffolding narrows the gap between learning with assistance and independent performance. By gradually releasing responsibility for the function to the learner (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983), the teacher makes it possible for the learner to internalize an understanding of the mental function as well as perform the function independently. The successful use of scaffolding to encourage meaning-making greatly depends on the teacher's ability to create a context for open response, reflection, and discussion.

Our purpose in this multiple case study was to investigate the nature of the interaction and dialogue of at-risk readers during

scaffolded literature discussions and to determine the effects of an instructional approach on their reading, writing, and understanding of literature. To explore these areas, we raised the following questions: What is the nature of interactional patterns of discourse among the teacher and students during Transactional Literature Discussions? How do individual student's responses toward literature vary during the course of Transactional Literature Discussions? What is the impact of Transactional Literature Discussions on the reading and writing performance of individual students?

Method

Participants

Six fifth-grade students, four male and two female between the ages of 10 and 12, were selected to participate in this study on the basis of their poor classroom performance and poor comprehension on an informal reading inventory. Students attended a public school and were either enrolled in a Chapter I program or receiving instructional support for their reading difficulties. They were characterized as reluctant readers and writers who rarely read for their own pleasure and were failing to keep up with classroom assignments. To ensure that students had adequate decoding skills to read words at or above a fourth grade level, they were screened using two decoding assessments: the Names Test (Cunningham, 1990; Dufflemeyer, Kruse, Merkley, & Fyfe, 1994) and a 200 word passage from the book Shiloh (Naylor, 1991) which

students had selected to read during the study. A minimum score of 90% accuracy was considered sufficient.

Instructional Approach

To provide students with a framework for reading, writing, and discussing a full-length book, we used Transactional Literature Discussions (TLD), an instructional approach developed by the first author. We intentionally avoided imposing a set of preconceived notions about the way students should react to the story so they would be free to respond and become actively involved in the process of constructing meaning. In essence, we wanted students to think about the story and express their thoughts. We also wanted students to take responsibility for reading and making sense of the story, so we built opportunities for collaboration into TLD and incorporated students' suggestions into the literacy events. To ensure fidelity with the instructional approach, the first author was responsible for teaching the lessons and collecting the data.

TLD consists of a cycle of scaffolded literacy events which includes: getting ready, reading and thinking aloud, wondering on paper, talking about it, thinking on paper, and looking back. (See Figure 1) These events are opportunities for students and teacher to interact and jointly construct understanding about a story as it unfolds. The cycle is predictable to make it easy for students to become familiar with it, but flexible to allow students choices about their reading and writing activities. The discourse generated within each literacy event is dynamic in that it flows

from one literacy event to another as the story evolves and as students and teacher interact.

Beginning with getting ready, students are taught to preview the text and make predictions before reading. In reading and thinking aloud, students learn to voice their immediate responses to the story while reading. Wondering on paper encourages students to confront their spontaneous reactions to the story by writing them on a post-it note which is used to mark the portion of text they are referencing. By wondering on paper, students set their own agenda for discussion which enables them to initiate and regulate the discussions themselves. Talking about it sessions are social settings in which students explore and discuss their individual ideas with the teacher's assistance to develop deeper and fuller understandings. After talking about the story, students have an opportunity to compose a journal response during thinking on paper. This is a time for reflection and elaboration, so that students can expand their thinking as well develop their skill using written language to communicate their ideas. During looking back, reflection continues as students evaluate their responses and get ready to read the next portion of text. Thus, the cycle of events starts over again.

To help students engage in the talk sessions, we also developed RQL_2 strategies, an acronym for Respond, Question, Listen, and Link. (see Figure 2) Students generated the definitions for these strategies and used them to guide the talking

about it sessions.

Procedures

After reviewing a collection of books recommended by the authors and classroom teacher, students chose to read Shiloh (Naylor, 1991), a story about a young boy determined to save a stray beagle from its abusive owner. Shiloh was awarded the 1992 John Newbery Medal for the most distinguished contribution to American literature for children.

For eight weeks from mid-March through mid-May of 1995, students participated in fifteen lessons held once or twice a week for forty-five minutes each day. Drawing from the concept of gradual release of responsibility (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983), lessons were grouped into three segments of five lessons each. The first segment was characterized by teacher-directed reading, writing, and discussion. During the next segment, teacher direction was gradually reduced so that students and teacher shared responsibility for the activities and discussions. During the third segment, students led the discussions and participated in self-directed literacy activities while the teacher facilitated their efforts. Reading lessons were video and audio taped by the researcher and later transcribed. A discourse analysis of the dialogue about the story was conducted to answer research questions #1 and #2. Pre and post assessments in the form of a think aloud, an informal reading inventory, and a written response to a short story were used to collect product data about student performance

in order to answer research question #3. Students' perceptions of TLD were obtained through group and individual post interviews conducted by the first author.

Analysis of Data

A discourse analysis was conducted to describe the nature of the interaction and dialogue and the quality and variation of individual student's responses to the story. Only exchanges that focused on making sense of the story were analyzed. Coding of lesson transcripts was done by the first author. Interrater reliability was determined by two raters coding four transcripts. Agreement between the two raters was 91%.

To describe the student-student and student-teacher interactional patterns of discourse, the unit of analysis was an interactional pattern of discourse, defined as a "communicative exchange between at least two reading group participants" (Brown & Coy-Ogan, 1993, p. 232). Based on an initial reading of the transcripts and characteristics of constructive discourse that were built into the instructional approach, the following coding scheme was developed: collaboration, inquiry, assuming responsibility, and assisting performance. Audio and video tapes of the lessons were analyzed by reading and highlighting the communicative exchanges that were examples of each theme (Guba & Lincoln, 1981).

To describe the quality and variation of individual responses, a total of 722 student responses that focused on making sense of the story during the talking about it sessions were coded and

analyzed. A coding scheme was developed by reading through four transcripts of the lessons, describing responses with a phrase that reflected the quality of the meaning-making, and then clustering similar descriptions and responses together and assigning headings that described the characteristics. (see Figure 3) In the next section, episodes of discourse are presented to illustrate each theme, discuss the interaction, and describe student responses.

Results

Collaboration

The discourse was found to reflect high amounts of collaboration in the talking about it sessions as well as during the reading and writing activities. During the talk sessions, scaffolded dialogue in the form of uptake (Cazden, 1988), exchanges that incorporate student input into subsequent dialogue so that the discussions resembled conversation, was evident. The following episode is an example of scaffolded dialogue.

Donald: I mean near the end of chapter 7, it says Shiloh's lost.

George: No, they put him back in the pen.

Nicole: He took him for a run and then Dara Lynn came.

Together, students reread the text to verify what happened and then resume the discussion.

Teacher: Is he talking about Shiloh being lost?

Roy: He's talking about going to Heaven. Somewhere else in the story it says they put him in the pen after they find him...

Donald: He couldn't find Shiloh.

George: Yeah, it says after they found him. He told Dara so she couldn't find Shiloh.

Students also jointly constructed group retellings of the story. The following episode from TLD 4 illustrates how students jointly construct a group retelling.

Donald: I'll start.

George: You, then you, then me, then her.

Donald: This guy Judd, he got the dog from Marty and was being real mean to it. He kicked it because it was running around and Marty said, "Please don't kick the dog. I'll look after him. Just don't kick him."

Roy: Whenever Marty goes with his dad to deliver Sears catalogs, his dad is going to give him money so he can buy the dog back.

Student writing also reflected collaborative interaction. The following is an example of a journal response composed by two students as they passed the paper back and forth between them.

I thought that Shiloh was a good book. It should be a good book to everyone because Shiloh is a beagle and a hunting dog, and lovable.

Thus collaboration made it possible for students to engage in shared reading and writing and jointly make sense of the story.

Inquiry

Students approached the story with a natural sense of

curiosity followed by a genuine desire to probe their thinking that provoked thoughtful discussion. At first glance, students seemed to stray off the beaten path. However, a closer look revealed that these detours were like tributaries to the flow of discussion which allowed students to venture into unknown territory where they could take risks with their thinking while the text served as a common ground, a place to anchor their interpretations. Students used wondering on paper faithfully to engage in active inquiry by writing their immediate reactions to the story on post-its. Their wonderings focused on aspects of the story that students rather than the teacher identified as important. Early on, many wonderings dealt with the language of the text:

Why is this word printed like that? C'mon. It says See-mon.

Later, students identified and explored themes:

I wonder why Judd is such a bad person to be beating his dog.

Students also wondered about the characters' motives:

I wonder if Judd will sell Shiloh to Marty? Wondering on paper gave students a way to track their ideas so they could reflect on them. As one student reported, "It helped us remember."

Assuming responsibility

Students demonstrated that they could take responsibility for their literacy development by making decisions about their reading and writing and setting goals and achieving them. During the talk sessions, they learned to regulate their participation and determined when to cite and reread the text to support their

meaning-making. In the final segment of lessons, the discourse showed signs that students had internalized strategies that were previously taught and modeled for making sense of the story. This next episode from TLD 12 shows students use their wonderings to initiate the discussion and talk about what was important to them.

George: I wonder why Marty's mom wants to buy the dog. And I wonder why Judd won't sell it.

Donald: Because Marty's mom knows how much Shiloh means to Marty. And Judd's a cruel person.

George: I wonder why Judd won't sell it then?

John: Because it is his hunting dog.

Students disagree and challenge each other to justify their thinking in the following excerpt.

John: I wonder if Judd will let Marty keep Shiloh for more than a week.

Roy: He will! He said he will.

John: No!

Roy: Yeah he will! He said till Sunday.

Roy: I think that Judd should let him keep him (Shiloh) till Sunday and a few weeks after that.

George: Okay. Why?

Roy: Because what if the dog doesn't get healed?

In the next segment, a student offers another possibility for students to consider.

John: What if Judd let him keep Shiloh a few weeks after that

Sunday?

Roy: Judd probably won't.

George: Why?

Roy: Because Judd said that he wanted him back.

A student makes a prediction.

Donald: I predict that Marty gets the dog.

Roy: Why?

Donald: Cause he has no use for it. He doesn't listen. Shiloh runs back to Marty.

Another student asks the group to look beyond and explore what might happen in the future.

Allison: What's going to happen after Judd takes him home on Sunday?

George: He'll probably miss Marty and he'll probably run back to Marty.

Finally, a student surveys the group for additional comments before concluding the discussion.

John: Anybody have anything more to say about this chapter?

We believe that students were able to assume responsibility for constructing thoughtful dialogue about the story because they had their wonderings to guide them and had learned to listen and respond to their individual comments.

Students also made decisions about their reading and writing and set goals for themselves. For example, they decided to write letters to the author. Halfway through the story, they wanted to

"put on a play" for the entire school. Since their time was limited, students instead performed a readers theater for the third grade classroom. Signs of growing independence with literacy were also evident in their independent reading as this student shared:

Donald: I did some research about this person...Phyllis Reyn...

Teacher: Reynolds Naylor. And what did you find out?

Donald: She's the author of over 70 books. She's the author of Beetles, Lightly Toasted. She has a Newbery...

Nicole: She has two of them.

Donald: Want to know where I got my research from?

Teacher: Yes.

Donald: On the back of the book. Can I read it?

Teacher: Yes, read it for us.

Assisted Performance

Assisted performance is scaffolding in which the teacher assists learning by "...providing the structure, and children participate by providing the information" (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988, p. 20). The following means of assisted performance were used in this study: modeling, instructing, questioning, feeding back, and contingency managing.

Modeling refers to the use of linguistic and behavioral examples to demonstrate ways to make sense of the story. In this study, I modeled thinking aloud and wondering to express immediate thoughts and initiate discussion. During talking about it, I modeled RQL_2 strategies for making sense of the story by responding

to student comments and to the story events, questioning the meaning of the text, questioning students' ideas, linking story events, linking the story to my own experiences, and listening to what students said. I also modeled how to disagree without arguing, how to cite information from the text, how to summarize, and how to read to confirm or reject interpretations.

Instructing. Instructing involves giving explanations concerning how to perform literacy activities and meaning-making strategies in the process of reading the story. During the first two lessons, students were given explanations about the literacy events in the instructional approach. For example, I explained that talking about it was a time when students could share their wonderings and talk to each other about the story. Instructions were used also to increase student engagement in the meaning-making process by telling students to "say why" or "give a reason" that supported their thoughts; "clarify" by adding something more to students' comments; and "verify" by going back to the story to find and read the portion of text that supported their thinking.

Questioning. Two forms of questions were used in this study: assistance questions to help students think about the story and assessment questions to evaluate students' understanding. Assistance questions prompted students to reason through a line of thought and probe implicit meanings:

Allison: Marty's in deep trouble. *T: Why do you think he's in deep trouble?*

Assessment questions, by contrast, evaluated students' comprehension of the story by focusing on literal and explicit meanings. Examples of assessment questions are:

What happened so far?

What does it mean to grovel?

What are some clues that tell you?

Feeding back. Feeding back, or providing information about students' performance, was necessary to improve their performance. Common means of feeding back in schools include tests and grades; however, students were not tested or graded in this study. Instead, teacher feedback in the form of verbal and nonverbal acceptance usually followed by additional information or a question was used to let students know if their responses made sense. In this next episode, feedback helps students infer why Marty's mother is suspicious.

S2: He kept saving the squash.

T: And other food...

S1: For Shiloh.

T: (Nods in agreement) And when he saved the squash, that really did it? Why?

S6: He saved it for Shiloh.

T: But his mother didn't know that. Why?

S2: He saved stuff he didn't like, weird things till later.

Extrinsic feedback in the form of a point system was also used to encourage students to follow through with the reading and

writing activities. Students earned points for completing readings, participating in discussions, and writing journal responses. Once points totaled a designated amount, students were rewarded with a snack of cookies and punch.

Students' journal responses were used to give students feedback about their writing and to provide them with models of journal responses. Occasionally, I selected and distributed journal responses to students so we could read and discuss them.

Contingency managing. A means of using social reinforcement, rewards, and privileges to influence desired behavior, only positive forms of contingency managing were used in this study which included intangible forms, i.e. verbal praise, nonverbal approval; and tangible forms, i.e. the book, book markers, notebooks, and pencils. Students were delighted when they learned that the book they were reading was theirs to keep. An unexpected reward was the letters and pictures from the author of Shiloh. "Wow!" exclaimed one student as he studied the author's signature in awe. "This means we know someone famous."

In summary, the interaction among students and teacher reflected a collaborative effort to make sense of the story and high amounts of active inquiry as students wondered about the story and grappled with individual responses and multiple interpretations. Students demonstrated that they were able to assume responsibility for the meaning-making and their literacy development through self-initiated activities and increasing

independence with reading, wondering on paper, and the talk sessions. Assisted performance in the forms of teacher modeling, instructing, questioning, feeding back, and contingency managing was used to help students understand and perform literate behaviors. In general, the discourse across the lessons was aimed at the ultimate goal of making sense of the story and was embedded in authentic literacy events.

Individual Student Responses

Although wide variation was found in the quality and frequency of student responses, envisioning possibilities and understanding characters emerged as predominant responses for all students. Envisioning possibilities accounted for 36% and understanding characters accounted for 22% of all responses.

While there were individual differences, some students responded in similar ways. For Donald, George, & Roy, understanding text language was a more frequent response than predicting events, resolving misunderstandings, identifying personally, or retelling. Allison, Nicole, and Roy engaged in more retelling and Donald and Nicole voiced more opinions than all the others.

With respect to discussions which were teacher-led (lessons 1-5), collaborative (lessons 6-10), and student-led (lessons 11-15), students' responses fluctuated during the teacher- and student-led discussions, but remained high during the collaborative discussions. Roy had the highest number of responses in the

teacher-led and collaborative segments of discussions as well as the highest total number of responses across discussions. However, his responses during the student-led discussions decreased by more than half perhaps because students tended to discount his responses. By contrast, John had the least number of total responses across the discussions, but a high number of envisioning possibilities and understanding characters, as well as the highest number of personal responses. Donald showed a slight decrease in the number of responses across the lessons which parallelled a noticeable change in his behavior from one who tried to dominate discussions to a more collaborative and engaged participant. Responses of John, George, Nicole, and Roy increased in frequency from the teacher-led to collaborative discussions. Generally, responses peaked during the middle segment of discussions (lessons 6 - 10) when responsibility for meaning-making was gradually being released to students and the interaction was most collaborative.

Impact of TLD on Student Performance

Three informal measures were used to determine the impact of TLD on individual student's reading comprehension and written response to a story: Diagnostic Reading Scales (DRS), Forms A and B (Spache, 1981); a pre and post think aloud, and a pre and post written response to a short story. Students' letters were also evaluated because they approximated an authentic literacy event.

Generally, students showed growth in their ability to read and make sense of text. Comprehension on the post DRS improved at

least one grade level for three students and by as much as three grade levels for one student. Four students scored on a sixth grade level during oral reading, and on a seventh grade level for silent reading and listening comprehension. Although two students showed no improvement on the post DRS, their comprehension remained at the fifth grade level. Post think alouds showed evidence of closer, more efficient reading of the text. Students suspended judgment to avoid premature conclusions, integrated more text clues to refine their hypotheses, and appeared more confident in their ability to grapple with the meaning of a text.

Students had difficulty expressing their thoughts through writing and their pre and post written responses were brief and ranged in type from interpretive, critical, aesthetic, summaries, to retellings. On the other hand, students appeared more comfortable with writing letters to the author and this writing was more reflective, expressive, and revealed an awareness of the author's craft. One student empathized with the author..."I know how you feel. I used to have this neighbor who had a dog..." and spoke of the value in writing: "I think writing about things is a good way to express your feelings." Another student made reference to a story written by Naylor, "I know you wrote Beetles, Lightly Toasted. Students identified their favorite parts and responded with excitement: "If I was Marty, I would have jumped out of my shoes whenever Judd shot the rifle."

Students' Perceptions of TLD

We were interested in knowing how students felt about the reading and writing activities that they participated in as part of this instructional approach to determine what was particularly effective from their perspective. During individual interviews conducted by the first author, we asked students the following questions:

1. What worked for you? Why?
2. How was this different from reading instruction in your classroom?

In response to the first question, all of the students said that the shared experience of reading, writing, and talking about the story was what they liked most. More specifically, they identified wondering on paper, reading in groups, and responding and talking about the story as effective activities. Their comments below echo their satisfaction:

Roy: *I liked reading with people. I didn't have to read all the story. They could read some of it and I could read some of it and we could take turns.*

Allison: *Cooperation, talking about the story, reading together, and writing on note pads worked.*

George: *This reading was fun because we got to read with partners.*

John: Reading in groups, responding, reading all together, and writing on the post-it notes and in the journals worked. It was fun.

Donald: *We talked about everything. We did journals and post-it*

notes.

We knew that TLD was different from their classroom reading instruction, but wondered if students noticed any differences. Their insightful comments revealed that they did -- in terms of the activities, their own involvement, and their approach to reading as a meaning-making experience.

Roy: *We don't get to be leaders in class. In class, we're not allowed to use post-it notes.*

Nicole: *Usually we read by ourselves, not with a group or anything. And we share some questions, but we never think.*

Allison: *In our classroom, we just read the story. We don't think about it. We don't write questions on the paper.*

George: *In school, we usually don't talk about it. We like just read and the teacher asks questions. He tells us to do questions on paper. We don't use post-it notes and we don't link ideas.*

John: *We don't read in groups. We don't write down our responses. And we don't read books. We just read ones (stories) in our reading book.*

Donald: *In the classroom, the teacher just tells us to read the story. Then he passes out all these papers. He gives us six a day and they're due the next day. You know, stuff -- questions.*

Conclusions

The results of this study suggest that Transactional Literature Discussions is a promising approach to literacy instruction with at-risk readers. The framework of literacy

activities and the scaffolded instruction provide students with opportunities to practice reading and writing as social events in which they are free to think about text. As a result, students who participated in this study showed substantial growth in their ability to jointly construct meaning through discussions and enhanced comprehension on performance assessments. In the future, experimental studies might investigate the impact of TLD on at-risk, average, and above average readers with a variety of texts.

In addition to making personal connections, students responded to the story in other ways that were aesthetic. They noticed the language of the text, the sounds, spellings and meanings of words, and the dialogue. They respected the talent and work in the author's craft. They shared an appreciation for the story in the performance of the readers theater. These literary responses transcend the personal experience and warrant further study if we are to understand fully what it means to develop an appreciation for literature.

Students struggled with extended journal writing. They appeared to need additional time and support to more fully develop their responses through writing. Future studies might explore the use of scaffolded instruction to help at-risk readers expand their initial responses through writing.

Researchers should also study more extensively students' perceptions of literacy events in elementary language arts programs in order to tailor instruction to satisfy their needs and

interests, both intellectually and emotionally.

Figure 1. Model of Transactional Literature Discussions (TLD).

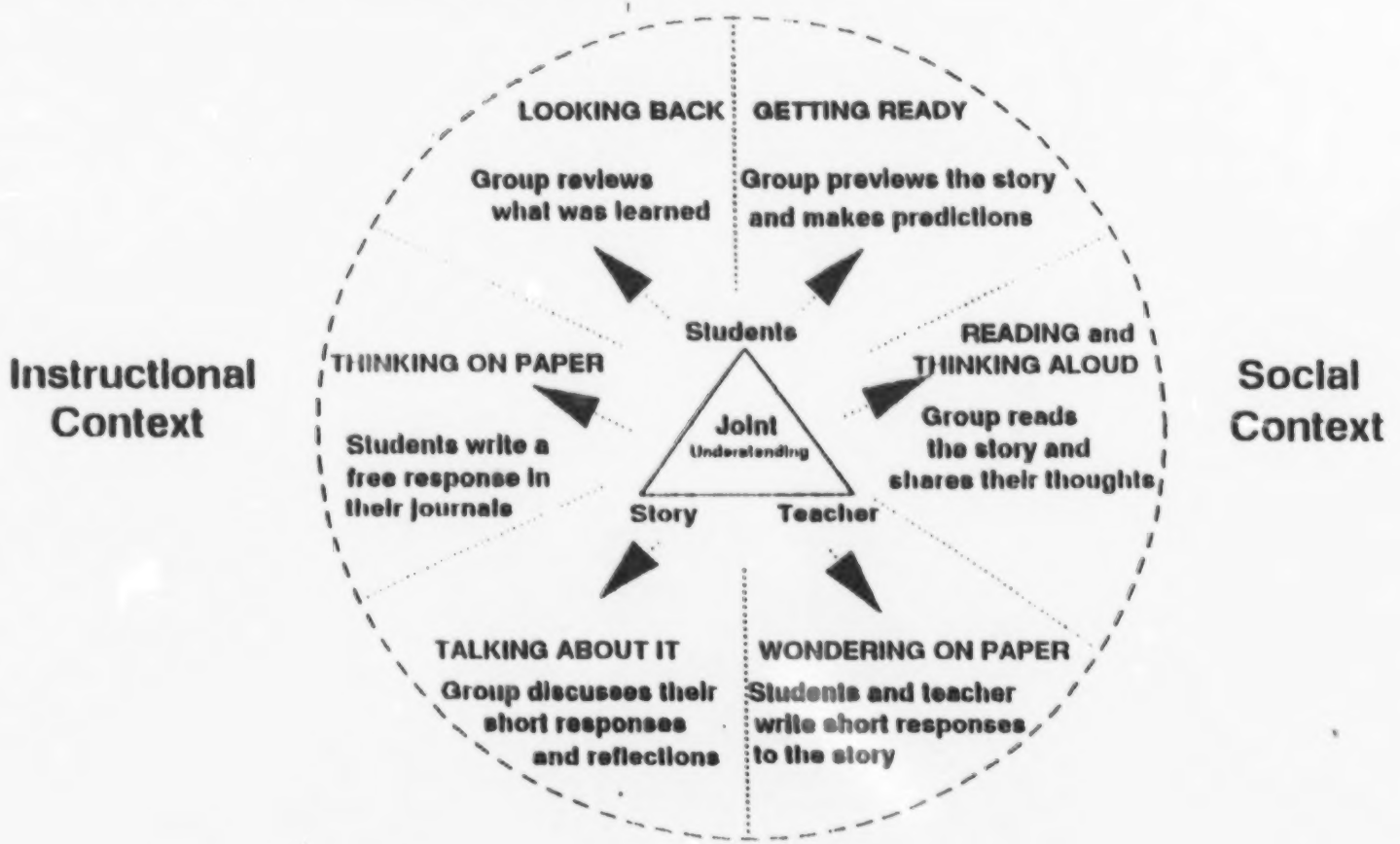

Figure 2. RQL_2 Strategies for Talking About a Story

1. RESPOND Say what you liked or disliked.
   Tell about your favorite part.
   Tell how the story makes you feel.

2. QUESTION Ask questions about the story.
   Ask your classmates and teacher questions.
   Ask questions the whole group can answer.

3. LISTEN Listen to what your classmates say.
   Listen and respond to the questions.
   Listen and join in the discussion.

4. LINK Link events in the story.
   Link your experiences with the story.
   Link your ideas with the ideas of your classmates.

Figure 3. Types of Response

PREDICTING EVENTS (PE)

Stating what might occur before reading a portion of the story.

RESOLVING MISUNDERSTANDINGS (RM)

Identifying and clarifying confusions.

UNDERSTANDING TEXT LANGUAGE (UT)

Questioning the meaning of words and phrases in the text.

ENVISIONING POSSIBILITIES (EP)

Exploring the meaning of past story events; looking beyond the text and drawing inferences.

IDENTIFYING PERSONALLY (IP)

Relating personal experiences that are similar to or connected with story events and characters.

UNDERSTANDING CHARACTERS (UC)

Focusing on the behavior and motives of the characters.

VOICING OPINIONS (VO)

Expressing a like or dislike for the story or characters; making judgments based on attitudes or beliefs.

RETELLING (RE)

Paraphrasing or summarizing events after reading the story.

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